

MISSION RIDGE.

A PRIVATE'S GRAPHIC ACCOUNT OF THIS HISTORIC BATTLE.
Read by a Member of La Fayette Post,
New York city.

The attention of many of our citizens has doubtless been drawn to the large photograph of La Fayette Post, No. 140, G. A. R., now on exhibition in the window of Geo. M. Wood, the druggist.

If each individual member of the post should write his experience during the war, it would fill many a column of THE CITIZEN, and add pages to the unwritten but not the less interesting history of the war.

Mr. Albert M. Cudner, a private in the Seventy-fourth Illinois Volunteer Regiment, read the following paper at a recent camp-fire held by La Fayette Post, of which he is a member.

Mr. Cudner followed Sherman in his memorable one hundred days' campaign and the capture of Atlanta, taking part in all the engagements in which his corps was engaged, and during his term of service participated in many battles, some of which were Perryville, Stone River, Missionary Ridge, Rocky Face Ridge, Resaca, New Hope Church, Kennesaw Mountain, and many others.

Comrades: My orders from the Chairman of your Entertainment Committee for to-night were to give you a ten minutes talk, consequently I shall cut a narrow swath, go straight through and stop on time. I will simply set up a frame-work here and there, leaving the finishing, decorating and filling up of the structure to yourselves.

On a bend in the Tennessee River, about 110 miles south of Nashville, with its colossal proportions firm and immovable as the Rock of Ages, its summit reaching upward towards the clouds and capped by Pulpit Rock, from whose

platform is first heralded each day to five great States of our Union the advent of the golden orb of light stands

Lookout Mountain. Around its peak the feathered songsters pour forth the tuneful and jubilant notes of their matin song; the graceful, swaying pines along its sides whisper to each other of the day just born, while the shrubs, clustered at their base, timidly look up in pleased expectancy, and all nature, instinct with a new life, bursts forth in the grand harmony of her morning anthem.

Lookout Mountain stands like a grim sentinel, stern and unyielding as fate, keeping watch and ward over a little city nestled in the valley at its foot, a mere pin-hole on the map, but, as we spell out its name from our perch on the mountain side, and, with memory's magic wand, call to our mental vision four years of our country's life, how it grows upon us. Its boundaries enclose the continent; its history is world wide.

The student lingers in its shadow, and the historian, poet and painter find an inspiration in the mention of its name—Chattanooga.

Comrades, this is sacred as well as classic ground; tread softly and with uncovered head, for your feet are resting on God's own recruiting ground. On this spot multitudes of the best of His creation put on their ascension robes, and the "taps" that sounded in their bivouac here melted away into a celestial "reveille," whose notes awakened them on His eternal camping-ground. They left with them their memory, sweet, sad and glorious. We gave to them the wreath of immortelles, fragrant with our affection and bedewed with our tears.

Lookout Mountain, Chattanooga, Mission Ridge, trinity of terrors in '63, monuments to men's heroism in all after time.

On the morning of November 24, 1863, the rebel flag floated from its staff on the summit of Lookout. The next morning the stars and stripes looked down on us in the valley from the same spot.

Mission Ridge, just beyond, was destined, before the sun went down, to discard the colors of treason and take its place under the emblem of loyalty, borne by the boys in blue.

During the year just passed, Buell, with our Army of the Cumberland, had pushed Bragg with his rebel army from the Ohio River, and fought and whipped him at Perryville, where his successor, Rosecrans, assumed command and drove him across the Cumberland River and through Nashville, fought him a two days' battle at Nolansville, whipped him soundly at Stone River, capturing Murfreesboro, and sent him flying over the Cumberland Mountains and across the Tennessee River, and maneuvered him out of Chattanooga.

In order to hold the town, he was compelled to fight the historic battle of Chickamauga, September 19 and 20. We held it until November 25 following, but it was the most difficult territory to hold that had ever come into our possession; we had a bull by the horns and could not safely let go.

The grand old Army of the Cumberland was besieged. The enemy was in position strongly fortified in our front, on our right and on our left, and the batteries on Lookout covered the rear.

Rations were very short, communication was cut off, horses and mules were dying of starvation, and the ranks and file of the army were destitute of everything but pluck. We could not stay in Chattanooga; the fate of our army, the rescue of Tennessee from rebel domina-

tion and the success of our cause in the West depended upon our breaking through the toils that Bragg had thrown around us. We could not retreat, for we had no horses for our artillery, no mules for our baggage wagons, and Lookout Mountain stood in our path. To go straight over Mission Ridge seemed to be the only way out of our terrible dilemma, and to dream of an assault on that stronghold seemed madness. Before us stood the mountain, 700 feet high, rocky and precipitous, with tangled undergrowth, logs and every other obstacle possible in our way, and, between the base and the summit, were three lines of log breastworks, each filled with troops that we must defeat. The summit itself was further defended by a battle of artillery, and our every movement from start to finish of the assault was in plain sight and range of the gunners.

But back yonder on Orchard Knob stood the great soldier of the century—the unconquered and unconquerable leader—and although he was new to us personally, every man of us felt that Grant's eye was upon him. By his side stood our loved old commander and hero, Thomas. His grand old Army of the Cumberland had never failed him and we all felt the influence of his unbounded confidence in us and would again justify it. Right with us, and one of us commanding our division, was the dashing Sheridan.

My time will not permit even an attempt at any general description of the battle of Mission Ridge, and besides, that is the province of the historian. I will simply give you a glimpse of our Second Division, Fourth Corps, in the charge, keeping you confined largely to the ranks of my own regiment. I am a private soldier and must give you the benefit of the private soldier's limited vision only.

Hooker had been ordered West with his gallant Eastern men, and to them belongs the credit of striking the first blow in the battle that ended with the capture of Mission Ridge, the assault and capture of Lookout Mountain; that noted battle above the clouds. Sherman, with his magnificent Army of the Tennessee, was there, and in them Hardee and his splendid corps on the rebel right found foemen worthy of their steel. Hooker's gallant charge and repulse of the enemy on Lookout Mountain threw their left flank back on Mission Ridge, opened our line of communication and placed the two armies in lines parallel to each other, the enemy on their fortified mountain and we in the valley below. Bragg had been watching our movements down there, and is reported to have called the members of his staff to come and see an "Army of the Potomac review." In a few hours, with the crowd buried in his horse's flanks, he was hurrying away to some hidden recess in Dixie, with that "review" in hot pursuit. In the afternoon of the 24th, we were ordered from our works out to the front and in the centre, Hooker on our right, Sherman on our left.

Our command bivouacked that night in a fringe of timber near the foot of the Ridge, and our orders—the only ones received by us in the night, from its commencement to its finish—were as follows: "The signal for your attack will be six guns from Orchard Knob. You are to charge and take the first line of works, at the foot of the Ridge."

The battle was opened in the morning by Hooker on our right, whose columns were thrown repeatedly against the rebel left, with a view to doubling it back, but without success. Bragg feared just such a move and was prepared for it. Sherman, at the same time attacked the enemy's right, but the difficulties in his front were insurmountable, and he could only hold them with a giant's grip and prevent any troops being sent to reinforce the centre.

The battle raged on both flanks the entire forenoon; noon passed and still we, in the centre, were standing in line waiting for the signal. At about 3:30 in the afternoon, a shot from our left and rear whizzed over our heads and struck near the top of the Ridge, and the Army of the Cumberland had thrown down its gage of battle. "Boys, that's Orchard Knob." No need for the order, "Attention, men!" We were in line in an instant, waiting for the last shot. It seemed an age, and only twelve seconds of time intervened between shots numbers one and six. Belts were tightened, cartridge boxes hitched a little further to the front, and cap-box covers were loosened. With shot No. 5, the order "Forward!" rang out, and the order "March!" accompanied the whizzing of No. 6.

A minute took us through the fringe of timber, and then came the expected final order, "Double quick, charge!" and the whole line dashed forward over the open plain toward the Ridge. Instantly the mountainside became volcanic; the troops in the three lines of works poured into us volley after volley of musketry, and thirty pieces of artillery on the crest rained shell and shot upon us. Men went down on the right and on the left; we were rushing through the valley of death, but there was no halt in the line and no shot fired by us until we had reached the first line, and the enemy was retreating to their next, when we halted and poured into them a murderous musketry fire. We had taken the first line of works, and had left behind us on that grassy plain, tinted with the variegated hues of the Southern autumn,

a blood-red page of history. Immunity's seal upon it, and ruled boundaries to centre with lines of forms arrayed in Federal blue, autograph of patriotism, stamped loyal blood that day on Chattanooga Valley, will never be erased. As the enemy had reached their second line of works, and were out of range of our own artillery, it opened on again, but now it was grape and case instead of shot and shell, an terrific fire of musketry at short range. We could not hold on to the foot of the Ridge; every inch of space was in range of the terrible deluge of lead and iron to stay meant death. We must up to the teeth of the storm or treat; to go back meant defeat. Without any orders, we sprang forward shouting to our buglers to blow advance.

Then commenced the life and struggle; no regular lines, no formation, no reserve line, no right-left guides, no "dressing" on right, or left, no file closers, but an individual generalship, every man his own commander and each determined to stand at the top.

We would deliver our fire, drop down on our side and reload, rush forward and again, up, up, until the second line was almost reached, when, with rally and a dash, we swept clean over our bayonets at the backs of the retreating enemy.

A glance backward explains to us a thinning out of our line and we need stop to count the forms lying there still, in order to estimate the percentage of our success so far. Our line had gone down once but was cast from the dying grasp of its bearers another gallant boy, and was waving the front. We rallied closer around and pressed on.

One more line of works and the total victory, or what? Capture or death, for we would never go back. We kept up our firing as rapidly as possible, crawling up a little further, rushing down to load, and we have covered nearly half the distance. We feel the hot breath of their angry cannoneers in our faces; we hear the shouts of defiance from their men, but we press ten closer and closer. Another color-bearer had gone down under our flag and now another falls. The dangerous emblem is caught up again, and with a "Hail to the flag, boys!" its bearer brings it to the front. We crowd close to it; tire a minute's bolt in which we take one long breath, our line reforms itself and, with a genuine Yankee cheer, and the resistless fury of a hurricane, we dash over the last line of works, up on the crest, rout infantry and artillery, and Mission Ridge is ours.

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